

However, for the third question — Is there evidence about how to improve formative assessment? — the answer was less clear. While the evidence provided many ideas for improvement, it lacked the detail that would enable teachers to implement those ideas in their classrooms. We argued that teachers needed “a variety of living examples of implementation.”

THE JOURNEY: LEARNING WITH TEACHERS

Since 1998, we have planned and implemented several programs in which groups of teachers in England have been supported in developing innovative practices in their classrooms, drawing on the ideas in the original article. While this effort has amply confirmed the original proposals, it has also added a wealth of new findings that are both practical and authentic. Thus we are now confident that we can set out sound advice for the improvement of classroom assessment.

THE KMOFAP PROJECT

To carry out the exploratory work that was called for, we needed to collaborate with a group of teachers willing to take on the risks and extra work involved, and we needed to secure support from their schools and districts. Funding for the project was provided through the generosity of the Nuffield Foundation, and we were fortunate to find two school districts — Oxfordshire and Medway, both in southern England — whose supervisory staff members understood the issues and were willing to work with us. Each district selected three secondary schools: Oxfordshire chose three coeducational schools, and Medway chose one coeducational school, one boys’ school, and one girls’ school. Each school selected two science teachers and two mathematics teachers. We discussed the plans with the principal of each school, and then we called the first meeting of the 24 teachers. So in January 1999, the King’s-Medway-Oxfordshire Formative Assessment Project (KMOFAP) was born.

Full details of the project can be found in our book, *Assessment for Learning: Putting It into Practice*.³ For the present purpose, it is the outcomes that are important. The findings presented here are based on the observations and records of visits to classrooms by the King’s College team, records of meetings of the whole group of teachers, interviews with and writing by the teachers themselves, and a few discussions with student groups. Initially, we worked with science and mathematics teachers, but the work has

been extended more recently to involve teachers of English in the same schools and teachers of other subjects in other schools.

SPREADING THE WORD

Throughout the development of the project, we have responded to numerous invitations to talk to other groups of teachers and advisers. Indeed, over five years we have made more than 400 such contributions. These have ranged across all subjects and across both primary and secondary phases. In addition, there has been sustained work with some primary schools. All of this gives us confidence that our general findings will be of value to all, although some important details may differ for different age groups and subjects. Furthermore, a group at Stanford University obtained funding from the National Science Foundation to set up a similar development project, in collaboration with King’s, in schools in California. Extension of our own work has been made possible by this funding. And we also acknowledge support from individuals in several government agencies who sat on the project’s steering group, offered advice and guidance, and helped ensure that assessment for learning (see “Assessment for Learning,” below) is a central theme in education policy in England and Scotland.

THE LEARNING GAINS

From our review of the international research literature,

ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING

▲ Assessment for learning is any assessment for which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting students’ learning. It thus differs from assessment designed primarily to serve the purposes of accountability, or of ranking, or of certifying competence. An assessment activity can help learning if it provides information that teachers and their students can use as feedback in assessing themselves and one another and in modifying the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. Such assessment becomes “formative assessment” when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching work to meet learning needs.